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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines some of the particular institutional and cultural obstacles that faced teachers and administrators at Bryant College (Rhode Island) as the business school began to internationalize its curricula and began adjusting towards a multicultural teaching/campus environment. The paper also presents some of the methods used in addressing these obstacles in the classroom in order to produce business school graduates who possess the flexibility and adaptability needed to succeed in today's international and intercultural marketplace. The paper addresses the issue of multicultural literacy in educational reform and argues that cultural and linguistic content should not be just an add-on of more information to learn, but should be part of a more inclusive understanding of cultural process, both within and across cultures. Examined are two kinds of obstacles present in business school students' backgrounds, experiences, and orientations that impede multicultural and linguistic learning: (1) those inherent in the institutional and curricular structures of the business college; and (2) those inherent in the structure of contemporary mainstream American culture. A conclusion is that the essential criterion of international/intercultural courses is that they require students to think about fundamental issues of experience and understanding in a very different way than they have been taught by society to accept. Contains 10 references. (GLR)

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PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL LITERACY IN COLLEGES OF BUSINESS

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"Internationalism": The New Emphasis

The recent drive in schools of business to incorporate international and intercultural dimensions into their curricula represents a response to influential ideas about the value of "internationalism," "cultural literacy" and "multiculturalism" which have filtered in from the wider academic community. These ideas have been ratified by the business world's concern about its ability to compete successfully in a changing global marketplace. In response to such ideas and concerns, business colleges throughout the country are scrutinizing their curricula and questioning the extent to which the traditional business CBK (common body of knowledge) can produce graduates who are sufficiently flexible and adaptable for today's rapidly shifting and changing international markets.1

The current national movement to promote the study of foreign languages and cultures is one particular manifestation of this new effort. The rationale for instituting these types of changes follows directly from the business community's realization that many of our business graduates are "domestic-centered" and, thus, ill-equipped to do business in newly emerging intercultural contexts and international settings. There is a widespread perception that we do not speak other languages and we do not speak other cultures, but we have a critical need to do both.

As anthropologists, we have been hired at a small business college in New England to inject larger doses of foreign languages and cultures into the

curriculum. One of us holds a newly-created position for the development and teaching of new courses in "Intercultural Communication" for Business Communication majors. The other was hired to turn a handful of French and Spanish courses into a foreign languages and cultures program, which now includes languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Russian and is still growing.

We are part of the new drive to "internationalize," for in preparation for the implementation of a new International Studies concentration, faculty throughout our institution are being called upon to add an international/intercultural dimension to their existing courses and to develop new courses that reflect these new concerns.

As an institutional commitment, "internationalization" has been framed as largely a question of introducing new types of content and faculty expertise into the existing business-oriented curriculum. Although we actively advocate all of the changes of which we are a part, we have come to feel that the most formidable obstacle is not so much the institutional lack of relevant courses or faculty with "international expertise." Rather, we feel that producing business school graduates who are able to adapt to meet the challenges posed by the international marketplace requires developing new approaches to teaching and learning. Although not all of our colleagues in the business area agree with our position, a fair number of our management, finance and marketing professors do.

The primary value of foreign language and culture courses is not their specific content, but their ability to disrupt our students' taken-for-granted understandings of the nature of knowledge and experience. Thus, our job is not so much to teach about other languages, societies and cultures as it is to lead students to confront critically the culturally constructed nature of all ways of thinking, knowing and evaluating. In the remainder of

this paper, drawing upon our experiences teaching in a business college undergoing change, we will outline the particular institutional and cultural obstacles we are trying to overcome, as well as some of the concrete methods we employ in the classroom to help us reach the central goal -- to produce business school graduates with the flexibility and adaptability needed to succeed in today's international and intercultural marketplace.

Multicultural Literacy: "Cultural Content" vs. "Intercultural Understanding"

One of the more influential yet implicit models for ideas about broadening the business curriculum to include new courses and to inject new content into existing courses is "cultural literacy"(see, e.g., Hirsch 1987). The basis of the concept of cultural literacy is the common-sense perception that the American educational system is generally failing to impart enough factual knowledge to students.2

Within academia, as well, we often hear complaints from faculty that students do not "know enough" about history, current international events, contemporary American society, philosophy, literature, the arts, and so on. In extreme cases, we have heard individual faculty complain that students do not have "the background" to allow the teacher to attain the desired goals and objectives of his/her particular course.

Influential critics such as Alan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch have argued that, in the final analysis, our students do not know who they are, where they have come from or why these things should matter to them. They are, in Hirsch's phrase, "culturally illiterate." The solution, in Hirsch's influential model, is to provide students with more "information," more "background" about who they are and where they come from (see, especially, Hirsch 1987).

Bloom takes this one step further than Hirsch by arguing that student "ignorance" of these matters amounts to a deep "moral failure" of our educational system (Bloom 1987).

Such contemporary ideas have triggered fierce national debates about "cultural identity," "heritage" and "morality," as well as violent condemnations of any and all attempts to prescribe the kinds of "information" that should be used to ensure that our students become "culturally literate." As a result, a number of educational institutions are now proposing that the only viable response to the perceived ethno- and euro-centric biases of "cultural literacy" is to expand traditional academic canons of "cultural literacy" to encompass "other cultures" and "other languages".

The moral and political dimensions of this drive towards "multiculturalism" have been influencing the ways in which business schools are now defining "internationalization." At recent meetings of our college's International Studies Committee, for example, there has been much discussion of the "need" for new courses that focus on various dimensions of cultural diversity in the contemporary world. These discussions of perceived "need" have stressed both moral and pragmatic concerns -- for their moral and social development, students "need" to be exposed to all types of human diversity; for their professional development, students "need" to have the kinds of cultural and linguistic knowledge that will permit them to work in the intercultural contexts of international business settings.

The fundamental problem is that the types of changes we and many other institutions are actually implementing tend to be content-driven rather than philosophically or pedagogically oriented. Consequently, the goal of teaching students to become "multiculturally literate" has become little more than an extension of Hirsch's earlier idea of "cultural literacy" as the mastery

of a specific body of information. Furthermore, as with Hirsch's original formulation of "cultural literacy," there is little or no argument for or against the pedagogical rationale for selecting specific types of "information."

To cite just one relevant example, at several of our International Studies Committee meetings it has been proposed that we require International Studies concentrators to take a sophomore-level "world geography" course. However, there have been no discussions about what such a course should include or how it should be structured. This is because our committee is not considering "world geography" as situated knowledge, or as a type of scientific perspective or analytical framework for understanding the significance of demography, climate, natural resources, and so on. Having perceived a "gap" in students' factual knowledge that is felt to be the consquence of the failure of secondary education, it is uncritically assumed that the role of the college in this instance is simply to fill in the "gap." However, all of these assumptions fail to address the fundamental question of what specific purposes certain kinds of factual information about the world should serve in the business college curriculum.

Such a content-driven philosophy of knowledge communicates to faculty and students the implicit message that learning other languages and other cultures can be a straightforward process of incorporating new facts about the world into preexisting frameworks for understanding. Learning about "other languages" and about "other cultures" simply adds one more level of content to the existing curriculum.

We do not want to argue that cultural and linguistic content is irrelevant. Nor do we wish to deny that robust area studies programs can prepare business students to perform for American companies in specifically targeted international settings. Nevertheless, we still do not believe that such

an approach to educational reform can achieve the more important and more relevant goal of producing business school graduates who will be well-equipped to adapt successfully to a broad and ever-changing variety of intercultural contexts of business both at home and abroad.

We do want to argue that cultural and linguistic content is only relevant when subordinated to a more inclusive understanding of cultural process, both within and across cultures. Failure to understand the ways in which cultural and linguistic behaviors are expressions of different ways of interpreting and experiencing the world can make people who are otherwise highly knowledgeable about an area ("multiculturally literate") less than effective cultural brokers.

We are thinking, here, of a businessman one of us met recently who had extensive experience in Asia and a reasonable command of historical, social and linguistic knowledge. In spite of this knowledge, his trade negotiations with Chinese in the People's Republic of China had led him to conclude that they were closet capitalists: that their economic values were just like ours. The not-uncommon failures of such trade negotiations this man readily attributed to the Chinese lack of experience in negotiating with Western capitalists. He believed that they were not as adept at putting their economic values into practice as we were, but that sooner or later they would "catch on."

This experienced American businessman had never considered (and refused to consider) the very likely possibility that differences in economic behavior were, in part, evidence of deep differences in basic philosophies of human relations; that Chinese and Americans might have equally strong stakes in trading with each other, but each might have profoundly different assumptions and values about how, with whom, and under what circumstances

to engage in international trade; that Chinese were no more predisposed to change their basic assumptions and values because they were trading with us than we were predisposed to change ours because we were trading with them.

To achieve our goals of producing business school graduates who are well-equipped to deal with just these types of circumstances, we need to teach students not just "multicultural literacy," but, more importantly, "intercultural literacy." By "intercultural literacy," we mean the learned ability to identify and to interpret the cultural bases of all interactions in all types of contexts and settings and to apply that type of understanding to interactions with people, ideas and literatures from other cultures. This "intercultural literacy" demands that students acknowledge, examine and question both their own and others' taken-for-granted assumptions and interpretive strategies.

As anthropologists, we are predisposed to believe that this kind of cultural sensitivity is a valuable part of students' personal and intellectual development. We also believe that this sensitivity will have enormous short and long-term pragmatic value for American businesspeople driven by economic necessity into foreign markets. In the short term, our students may be more sucessful in their dealings with other cultures. In the long term, the way that they conduct themselves will contribute to the image of the United States in the rest of the world. It is common knowledge that we are not known for our cultural sensitivity.

It follows, then, that teaching intercultural literacy is much more than educational reform by the addition of cultural and linguistic content. First and foremost, teaching intercultural literacy is about disrupting our students' understandings of the nature of knowledge and value itself. This is essential to our overall goals of "internationalization" and "multiculturalism,"

for taking other cultures seriously and granting importance and dignity to different ways of being and communicating is a necessarily unsettling experience. It forces us to realize that our own accepted understandings and practices are neither natural nor inevitable. By contrast, a study of other cultures or languages which only teaches students to recognize differences without challenging their own understandings of their own world in some profound way will not help them to deal with unfamiliar intercultural contexts and international settings. This is because the recognition of differences alone will not lead them to see that their own beliefs and behaviors are based on cultural principles which can and, perhaps, should be modified by contact with people from other cultures.

Institutional and Cultural Obstacles to the Teaching of Intercultural Literacy

If we want our students to become "interculturally literate," to learn to take language, culture and communication seriously, we ourselves must first recognize and take seriously the ways in which our business school students' backgrounds, experiences and orientations to learning can act as formidable obstacles to the achievement of "intercultural literacy." In general, we can identify two main sources of these obstacles. First, we have found obstacles which are inherent in the institutional and curricular structures of the business college. Second, we have found obstacles which we and other social scientists argue are inherent in the structure of contemporary "mainstream" American culture (see, e.g., Moffat 1989; Varenne 1986;Lasch 1978). We will deal with each in turn.

The Institutional Context

First of all, there is the skill/content orientation which is built into the logic

of the business college and, therefore, frames the practices and habits which constitute our students' everyday educational experiences. In particular, we have found that the institutional division of the college curriculum into business courses defined as "professional" and "major" and natural science, humanities and social science courses defined as "elective" encourages our students to compartmentalize academic knowledge and experience into dichotomous halves -- the "professional" and the "objective" versus the "personal" and the "subjective"(see, e.g., Moffat 1989).

Our College both recognizes these student understandings and reproduces them systematically as "institutional fact." To take just one telling example, semester-end course-evaluation questionnaires ask students to discriminate between the extent to which a particular course has contributed to their "professional development" and the extent to which it has contributed to their "personal growth." After two years of teaching courses in Chinese language and culture at this College, one of us has discovered that students systematically rate these courses very highly in terms of "personal growth" but relatively low in terms of "professional development." In spite of the fact that the instructor explicitly frames these courses in terms of "professional development" and incorporates relevant "real world" materials, even when students rate these courses "highly," they continue to distinguish carefully between "professional' and "personal" aspects of knowledge and experience.

We have also found that compartmentalizing academic courses into dichotomous domains of "professional" and "personal" knowledge and experience predisposes students to think of "professional" knowledge as an "objective" and, therefore, unproblematic and closed mode of understanding and evaluating "real world" situations. "Personal" knowledge, on the other hand, is a "subjective" and, therefore, problematic and open-ended mode of

understanding and evaluation that is not systematically linked to the "professional" requirements of dealing with "real world" situations.

This "student world view" tends to have profound consequences for the way in which students are oriented both to their business courses and to their non-business courses. On the one hand, students do not expect faculty teaching business courses to raise critical problems of interpretation, understanding and practice that cast basic principles of management, accounting or marketing into question. On the other hand, although students do expect faculty teaching non-business courses to raise such critical questions, the fact that they do is perceived to be a function of the subject matter alone, a fact which bears no necessary relationship to the content and structure of business courses.3

We have found that a number of our colleagues are aware that this is a problem that is deeply rooted in the logic of the traditional business curriculum. Over lunch one afternoon, we were discussing our ideas for this paper with a senior faculty member in the Accounting Department. He responded, in particular, to our reflections on the problem of topical and conceptual closure in the professional courses, such as Accounting. He acknowledged that the skill orientation of the Accounting curriculum did not lead students to think about situations of change in which the "rules" themselves are called into question as potentially "unworkable" or "inapplicable" in particular contexts.

As a professional, practicing Accountant, this professor had experienced such situations and, on reflection, realized that Accounting courses typically did not provide students with the types of knowledge and understanding they would need to deal creatively with shifting conditions and unanticipated changes in situated accounting practices. He concluded that

Accounting faculty should present students with such "problematic cases" of shifts and changes and spend more time teaching students how to think about and how to deal with them.

At the same time, this Accounting professor recognized that strategies for presenting problematic cases often conflict with student and institutional expectations about the necessary character of the "professional" business courses. There are strong expectations that the "professional" courses will furnish clear-cut examples of direct relevance to the everyday business world. Thus, because the courses in Intercultural Communication that one of us teaches are part of the Business Communication program, a "professional" concentration, both the administration and the students expect that these courses will have "direct relevance" to the everyday business world. In negotiations with the administration over the appropriate wording of new course proposals, the instructor has been pushed to furnish "business examples" in order to ground theoretical concerns in "recognizable" business contexts. The problem here is that the majority of our students have no practical experience in the everyday business world and, thus, they tend to take specific cases and examples as quite literally and unproblematically embodying the "facts" and "rules" of everyday business practices, rather than viewing such cases and examples as vehicles for thinking more critically about the inherent difficulties of "doing business." This type of thinking is further reinforced by student understandings of "professional development," as embodied in the curriculum, that lead them to assume a crucial disjuncture between the learning of "facts" and "rules" and the development of critical, interpretive skills.

We have found, in fact, that these expectations and orientations to the "professional" courses can actually obstruct or obscure our students'

grasp of the type of knowledge -- "intercultural literacy" -- we are trying to promote. This can be illustrated by an examination of student responses to two different classroom assignments in a junior-level course in Intercultural Communication --

Example I -- Normative Understandings of Business Contexts

Students were first given a standard work on forms of address. This reading did not differ in significant ways from descriptions of organizational practice they might encounter in business texts: the linguistic activity was presented as a predictable set of unambiguous rules. To discourage such an unproblematic reading, students were then given an article on naming practices in a contemporary business environment which emphasized the ways in which conventional rules for linguistic behavior are adapted and negotiated in specific contexts.

The instructor expected that students would bring to the classroom an understanding of business settings -- the relationship between individual interests and the social organization -- that would serve as a starting point for an indepth discussion of how language reflects and influences a variety of organizational principles as well as individual interests. The problem was that since these were business students and not business practitioners, their only personal experience of "business" was in the classroom.

They were not, therefore, particularly adept at imagining the multiple and, sometimes, conflicting interests and principles at work in various players' choices of forms of address. At the same time, they imagined that they understood "familiar business contexts" and tried to fit a case that was about the manipulation of ambiguity into a much more static, normative image of organizations as fixed structures of clearly bounded roles and rules.

While this exercise may have been useful as a means of countering students' assumptions that the meaning of organizational behavior is transparent, this only brought them to the point of departure that had been anticipated for this particular class discussion of the role of language in organizational context. Because the business content of the exercise did not have rich experiential resonances for these students, the example was of no particular benefit to the intended purpose of the class. More importantly, because the nature of the example did evoke their experience of business education, the "relevant" content itself posed a conceptual obstacle. The particular learning event was marked as "professional" and, therefore, in the students' world view, it was relevant primarily in terms of "facts" and "rules" rather than as a means of honing interpretive skills.

Even when the framework of the course itself encourages intercultural analysis, we often see business content operating as a barrier to students' understanding of interpretive processes and cultural principles --

Example II -- Literal Readings of Organizational Narratives

In one course entitled "Culture and Communication for International Business," students read several articles on organizational symbolism and uses of metaphor. This had been the basis for classroom analysis of the social and ideological implications of "organizational stories" they had read in their basic texts.

At the end of this course segment, students were given a written assignment in which they had to find and analyze the implicit principles/philosophies of social values that could be found in autobiographical accounts by successful businessmen, as well as in corporate training or

promotional literature. Almost without exception, students read the organizational literature they selected for analysis quite literally -- for content -- in the way that they may have been encouraged to read for some of their other "professional" classes.

Their essays looked much like factual reports or descriptive case studies, another genre imported from other classes. At least half of the students simply described an organizational ideology, accepting it wholesale as an accurate representation of the "facts," rather than as a selective account of culturally grounded values. That is, they reported -- "In company X employees are like a family" -- rather than interpreted -- "Company X uses the idea of family to express a corporate ideology of organizational relations."

Although student understandings and performance, as illustrated in these two examples, do not discredit the value of these kinds of exercise, they do suggest that the conceptual rupture we are advocating may be best achieved by first producing a rupture with their taken-for-granted perceptions of "familiar" contexts and contents. We need to teach them how these particular frames of reference are culturally grounded, and then we can return them to the analysis of "familiar" business examples. In this way, we can try to prevent students from relying upon what they take to be a familiar frame of reference, in which they tend mistakenly to take meanings for granted.

The Cultural Context of "Mainstream" America

In addition to cultural aspects of the institutional context of professional business schools, our students bring to the classroom orientations towards diversity and individualism that are inherent features of "Mainstream" America. These orientations have, as we will argue, a significant impact on their

interpretations of the role of culture, as well as the nature of critical analysis, in ways that hamper faculty efforts to promote "intercultural literacy."

The compartmentalization of types of knowledge does not just come from the institutional context, for it is equally a refraction of our students' socialization in a wider contemporary culture of individualism (Lasch 1978; Moffat 1989). We see the convergence of student notions of "individualism" and the institution's definitions of different kinds of knowledge in the ways that our students approach the demands made on them to engage in critical interpretation in humanities/liberal arts courses.

Since the contemporary culture of individualism severely downplays or denies the dependence of individual behaviors, values and understandings on wider social and cultural frameworks, interpretation (already sharply contrasted with "factual" or "professional" knowledge by our students) is ultimately cast as "opinion." Here "Opinion" has a personal, idiosyncratic and, therefore, untestable relationship with the "facts;" therefore, any discussion at the level of critical ideas comes to be interpreted as a "personal" one, with all the attendant risks of interpersonal interaction. Students have told us on more than one occasion that they did not want to "dispute" a particular point raised by another student in class for fear of "insulting" him/her or "hurting his/her feelings." On another occasion, one of our students responded to our comments in the margins of her paper -- "don't be so critical." In all of these and similar cases we have encountered, students often take "criticism" to be a direct attack on the "person" because they do not always see their ideas as being linked to larger frameworks of meaning and understanding that transcend the strictly "personal."

Students have also been influenced by the general pedagogical

emphasis on the value of diversity which is not at all peculiar to the business school environment. Students in the nineties have been taught long before coming to college that "diversity" is to be celebrated and prejudice eliminated. However, because they have been taught the lesson of cultural relativism within an empirical and individualistic framework, theirs tends to be a naive and empty relativism which utlimately attaches no real significance to differences.(see, especially, Moffatt 1989).

This taken-for-granted, "value-free" relativism that we see in many of our students inevitably relegates culture to the status of opinion -- cultural differences become a set of incommensurate, unbridgeable perspectives grounded in nothing but the "person." Thus, the lesson of cultural relativism -- that one should not be judgemental about differences in cultural perspectives -- tends to be translated into a taboo on all judgements. "Don't be so critical." Any critical classroom discussion of difference, thus, tends to be viewed as bias.

One example of the ways that this cultural and conceptual orientation acts as an obstacle to the cultivation of intercultural literacy comes from a discussion of race and ethnicity in the "Culture and Communication for International Business" course discussed above --

Example III -- The Immutability of Individual and Cultural Boundaries

Students were asked to read an article on chicano ethnicity and to attend a lecture by a prominent black scholar. The article challenged the definition of ethnicity as a fixed set of traits. That is, it challenged the idea of "ethnicity" as content, defining it instead as a process of individual and collective identification. The lecture focussed on instances of interracial/interethnic misunderstanding. A number of the speaker's examples

had to do with linguistic behavior like "labeling," examples which the speaker drew from his own experiences of being challenged by others for the use of common "labels" for ethnic identity.

Both the reading and the speaker emphasized that linguistic choices relating to notions of race and ethnicity were inherently political choices: they were strategic statements about relationships between minority and non-minority communities. In short, both the reading and the speaker showed how difficulties in the linguistic situation were reflections of social relations that were often ambivalent or confictual.

The students' assignment was to write an essay comparing and contrasting the definition of ethnicity in the reading and in the lecture. They were instructed to reflect on how they might actually apply what they had learned to potential communicative conflict in the workplace.

With almost no exceptions, our students focussed on the psychological, individual aspects of ethnicity, to the total neglect of the social. They did understand how people could feel different, but because of their tacit acceptance of the "individual" as the inviolable unit of understanding, further discussion was closed for them. Individual and personal differences was unquestionable, practically unmentionable. This, too, was a function of their acceptance of the idea of "value-free" differences.

One student commented in his paper -- "Spending time pointing out differences between people in different cultures and arguing over definitions really does not go too far in creating a feeling of tolerance." In other words, as soon as differences become socially undeniable and values are attached to these differences, the only possible outcome is debilitating conflict. Because our students held the idea of "diversity" as incommensurable and value-free

difference, the only solutions they could imagine to intercultural conflict required denying differences altogther.

As a matter of fact, few of these students were able to imagine the possibilities or consequences of cultural differences at all. Most of their essays did not really address the question of how ethnic or racial identities might affect the workplace. Those who did recognize the possibility of intercultural conflict in the workplace concluded that it could be eliminated by mandate. These prescriptions for behavior were also designed to deny difference altogether.

One student wrote -- "As far as dealing with these tensions in a business setting, one must relinquish any ill feelings towards certain groups...the ugly head of prejudice need not be reared." Yet another student, obviously responding to the instructor's identity as an anthropologist, wrote -- "It is very important to put ethnocentric tendencies aside when dealing with people of different cultures...one should study a culture from a representative sample and become part of them in order to understand their customs."

Such student perspectives are ultimately based on the assumption that individual identities and cultural boundaries are fixed and immutable and that intercultural contact is, at best, a grudging accomodation rather than a negotiated interaction in which both parties might actually change. In our terms, it is this type of understanding that must be cultivated if our students are to become interculturally literate. As we have also tried to show, the obstacles to accomplishing our goals are formidable. Faculty must recognize the nature of these obstacles and be prepared to tackle them head on.

Overcoming Obstacles to the Achievement of Intercultural Literacy

In the best of all possible worlds, we would argue for "culture across the curriculum." In the real world in which we teach, the fact that language, culture and communication are compartmentalized topics in the business curriculum means that we have to think very carefully about the kinds of ideas we emphasize in our classes, as well as the ways we teach them. Anthropology as a discipline has always tried to promote both cultural relativism and an appreciation for cultural universals. Its traditional strategy has been to start by drawing attention to difference as a way of offsetting the uncritical assumption that everyone is the same.

But that strategy is a child of a different era. What this last example illustrates is that it no longer works as well as it once did, for students in the nineties now have the opposite uncritical assumption that everyone is different yet separate. Furthermore, the value-free relativism to which we have referred means that students deny the relevance of difference in contact situations. This means that we find ourselves devoting an extraordinary amount of effort in the classroom pleading for the significance of cultural differences by emphasizing various kinds of intercultural misunderstandings. This is because it is the only way of demonstrating to these students that all claims to identity create and reflect social boundaries, and that these boundaries are extremely powerful sources of individual understandings of identity and inclusion that, by definition, raise the possibility of conflict with other individuals as members of other social communities.

Unfortunately, as we have argued, students resist seeing these

kinds of misunderstandings in any other way than as conflict situations to be avoided rather than negotiated. It is very difficult, once you have elicited this response, to move the discussion to the next stage, which involves recognizing that while humans are indeed divided by cultural content and practices, they share in the experiences of cultural processes. In the class on ethnicity, one of the key points was that people ("minority" or not) use linguistic devices like labeling in similar ways to assert and negotiate their identities in intercultural contexts. Conflict in intercultural interaction can only be avoided when each party recognizes that they are united by a common process of attempting to achieve mutual understanding, and therefore, takes each other's presentation of identity seriously.

In other words, we have to make students aware of the significance of language and culture: first in their own, and then in others' lives before we can meaningfully discuss sameness or difference. How do we best do this? First of all, as we have suggested, it seems useful to break the frame which defines students' experience in the majority of their courses.

This semester we have been trying to do these things in a sophomore honors course that we team-teach. We should point out that neither the administration nor the students expect this to be like "professional" business courses or necesarrily directly relevant to "professional development." At the same time, as an "honors" course, this course seems to carry more prestige in the eyes of our students than other humanities/liberal arts courses. Thus, this marked curricular definition of our course has assisted us, in part, to overcome some of the more familiar institutional obstacles we have been discussing.

The honors course is structured around conceptual and analytical themes, to which linguistic and cultural content is consistently and strictly

subordinated. We have had our students read and critique claims to knowledge and authority in ethnographic, autobiographical and novelistic accounts of other cultures and of intercultural encounters set in Africa, Australia, San Francisco Chinatown, Samoa and an American university. As an important first step in this semester-long analysis, we teach our students to consider carefully the nature of the intercultural encounters which serve as the basis for specific representations of "otherness."

In forcing them in class discussions and in writing assignments to consider the experiential basis of an author's knowledge of "others," we lead them to consider their own assumptions about knowledge and experience. This continuous process of critical examination invariably brings them back to the sometimes painful requirement of turning a critical gaze on themselves and on the conditions of their own lives.

This process is uncomfortable because they discover that this course challenges particular strategies for reading and writing that are not challenged in other courses. Even though the course is defined in ways that removes institutional markers of traditional "content" and "closure," our students still tend to read every account very literally. They are surprised that the authority of a text can be challenged; they are equally surprised that the authority of a personal opinion can be challenged. Both of these challenges are essential ingredients of this course and we have had them rewrite their analyses of texts on several occasions with the explicit goal of identifying and critically examining their own implicit assumptions about what constitutes "fact," "rules" of evidence and interpretation and the nature of "argument." This critical process utlimately puts students in the satisfying role of the knowledgeable cultural/textual critic of others, as well as of themselves.

Finally, students are required to conduct an original ethnographic research project, in which they must apply, with learned skills that surprise them, their powers of observation to analytical problems of great relevance to the real world of business.

This class multiplies the opportunities for cultural rupture. By reading and criticizing ethnographies, we expose them to the different cultures described in ethnographic accounts, but we also make them engage with the texts in ways which challenge their own understandings of what knowledge, learning and "otherness" is all about. Because the class is quite different from other courses that they take, it constitutes, in itself, a laboratory of cross-cultural experience: students are forced to grapple with difference in philosophies of learning in order to make the grade. They have begun to realize this.

One of our students wrote to us in the daily journal that we have required them to keep. She told us, in effect, that we should be aware that we were imposing a new culture of learning on them. She likened what we were doing in the classroom to adult foreign language learning, in which students have to battle years of monolingual reflexes. We ought to be taught other languages as children, but we aren't, she wrote. We ought to have had this course first, but we didn't. Her commentary is actually an important step towards the achievement of intercultural literacy: she has begun to question and examine and, therefore, take her own cultural identity seriously.

The specific texts we read also contribute to our goal of creating a rich experiential context for the students' understandings of the nature of cultural identity in their own and in other's lives. Reading ethnographies and ethnographic novels rather than topic-centered, shorter readings discourages students from seeing "culture" as bounded, concrete, consistent and

unproblematic knowledge and "content." In good ethnographies (and here we are thinking of books like Meyerhoff's Number Our Days, or Heath's Ways With Words), students read about people with depth and character, people whose cultural understandings can be sources of conflict and uncertainty as well as of strength and conviction. Cultural snapshots can be extremely evocative for people who already have a strong sense of themselves as parts of a culture, and who have had experiences that have forced them to reflect on that culture.

However, most of our students have not had to engage in this type of reflection. The presentation of the topic of ethnicity described above did not work particularly well because it failed to take into account the ways in which students' understandings of their cultural selves are influenced by the emphasis on diversity in educational culture and the general emphasis on individualism in this society. The short article and the encapsulated lecture were too easily read by our students as confirmations of social categories and "facts" they already "knew" about.

Reading a full ethnography, on the other hand, allows the instructor to shift the focus of discussions from "social categories" to "social processes," which students can actually identify and follow in these longer narratives. This, then, allows us to shift from the discussion of difference to the discussion of differentiation: the ways in which cultural differences structure human interaction.

This emphasis on process is built into the focus of many modern ethnographies on the nature of the interaction between the ethnographer and his/her "subjects." This illustrates, in compelling ways, the critical point that culture, as a framework for perception and interpretation, is part of all interactions. Ethnographic accounts allow us to show students how

personal/cultural concerns insinuate themselves into the simplest acts of observation and "data collection." Thus, we use the explication of the process of participant observation, analysis and representation to emphasize that knowledge is culturally constructed, that "facts" are not given in nature, but are pieces of information that are selected from a particular cultural perspective and arranged for a variety of purposes.

Notice that this strategy is designed to counter the obstacles of both empiricism and radical relativism that we consistently encounter in our students. We do not deny that there is any cultural content to be learned, nor that this content can be viewed from multiple perspectives. We do insist that these perspectives--both the students' and the ethnographer's--be evaluated as arguments, rather than as opinions. This amounts to requiring students to take "culture" seriously.

To conclude, we believe that, like most people, our students only take culture seriously when it becomes a pressing issue or problem of daily existence. Making culture count in the classroom is the key component to the successful teaching of intercultural literacy. The specific content of "international" or "intercultural" courses is of little import from this perspective. The essential criterion for such courses is that they require students to think about fundamental issues of experience and understanding in a very different way than they have been socialized to accept. Only in this way can we really hope to press our students into the understanding that is shared by all successful ethnographers and successful international businesspeople -- Intercultural contact is, by definition, fundamentally disruptive and postentially transformative.

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[1] Becoming "international" is also an economic imperative for small business colleges such as our own, which has been faced with national economic and demographic trends that have resulted in declining business school enrollments, as well as an overall decline in traditional employment opportunities for business school graduates.

[2] We do not wish to suggest that this perspective is universal. A number of formal assessments, such as the 1984 Carnegie Foundation Report on Higher Education, have resisted explaining widespread educational "failure" in terms of simple determinants. Nevertheless, there is a widespread assumption in America today that our students simply "do not know enough." (See, also, Task Force on Education for Economic Growth 1983 and Business-Higher Education Forum 1983).

[3] Until now business students have not been compelled by economic circumstances to question any of the skill/content orientation of their professional education. They are perhaps the last to become aware of the meaning of a changing, tightening job market. Nevertheless, we now hear seniors interviewing for jobs expressing their disillusionment that companies are increasingly hiring on "subjective," qualitative criteria, such as demonstrated analytical and communicative skills. Many of them are beginning to get the implicit message that employers either do not trust or care very little about WHAT they know.